What's Wrong with Current State Approaches to Addressing Student Mental Health Need?

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) has provided a useful service in summarizing "State Approaches to Addressing Student Mental Health". https://www.ecs.org/state-approaches-to-addressing-student-mental-health/

Our concern is that their policy brief tends to reify the limited and uncontextualized current approaches to mental health in schools.

For example, they emphasize the many ways to support student mental health in educational settings in the limited context of "the multi-tiered continuum of services, from promotion of positive mental health and wellness to treatment services." And they report that recent state action has focused primarily on (a) mental health and wellness curricula, (b) suicide prevention programs and services, (c) staff training and professional development, (d) mental health screening, (e) mental health professional staffing ratios, and (f) school-based mental health programs and services.

All of this reflects the unsatisfactory state of affairs with respect to improving how schools address mental health concerns and related learning and behavior problems.

Clearly, there is an important role for schools to play in addressing mental health concerns (especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic). However, as the ECS report and advocacy reports from others highlight, policy makers continue to approach concerns about learning, behavior, and emotional problems (and the factors that cause such problems) in an ad hoc and piecemeal manner. This has generated the widely acknowledged limited, issue-filled, and fragmented approaches to providing student and learning supports.

Our Center's analyses stress that this state of affairs reflects and continues to maintain the *marginalization* in school improvement policy and practice of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students. The marginalization is counterproductive to advancing mental health in schools.

Ending the marginalization is critical.

Toward this end, state approaches to addressing student mental health need to be embedded into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. See

> *>Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

Access at no cost at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

For more on this, see

> *>Mental Health in Schools is Not Just about More Services: It is part of a Comprehensive Approach to Student and Learning Supports*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7-1-21.pdf